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Plane Carried 13 Bin Ladens

Manifest of Sept. 19, 2001, Flight From U.S. Is Released

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At least 13 relatives of Osama bin Laden, accompanied by bodyguards and associates, were allowed to leave the United States on a chartered flight eight days after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, according to a passenger manifest released yesterday.

▼ **ADVERTISING** One passenger, Omar Awad bin Laden, a nephew of the al Qaeda leader, had been investigated by the FBI because he had lived with Abdullah bin Laden, a leader of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, which the FBI suspected of being a terrorist organization.

The passenger list was made public by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), who obtained the manifest from officials at Boston's Logan International Airport. Lautenberg's office was given the document in recent weeks and released it before today's issuance of the final report of the commission investigating the Sept. 11 attacks.

Although much was already known about the "bin Laden flight," Lautenberg provided additional details, including the information that the plane, a 727 owned by DB Air and operated by Ryan International, began its flight in Los Angeles and made stops in Orlando, Dulles International Airport and Boston before continuing to Gander, Newfoundland; Paris; Geneva; and Jiddah, Saudi Arabia. The aircraft, tail number N521DB, has been chartered frequently by the White House for the press corps traveling with President Bush.

A staff report by the Sept. 11 commission this spring said the flight was one of six chartered flights carrying 142 people, mostly Saudi nationals, from the United States between Sept. 14 and 24 after airspace was reopened. The U.S. government had allowed, before commercial airspace was reopened, at least one domestic flight for Saudis who had feared for their safety, Lautenberg's staff said.

The commission reported that there were 23 passengers and three private security guards on the bin Laden flight. However, the manifest lists 25 passengers, plus the three guards employed by CDT Training Inc. of Elmwood Park, N.J. After a request for permission to allow the bin Ladens to leave reached Richard A. Clarke at the National Security Council, the flight departed Logan Airport in Boston at 11 p.m. on Sept. 19, 2001.

Dale Watson, former FBI counterterrorism chief, said yesterday that FBI agents "scrubbed the people who were leaving, and I was informed none of them were anybody we needed to detain or not allow to leave."

Lautenberg, in a statement, said that Bush "needs to explain to the American people why his administration let this plane leave." White House spokesman

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Sean McCormack said the contentions that the flight should not have been allowed to leave have been "debunked by the facts."

Ron Ryan of Ryan International said yesterday that he is "quite confident" that the Saudi Embassy arranged the flight through a Ryan partner called Sport-Hawk. He said the bin Ladens "were quite concerned for their safety," which alarmed the crew. "The Saudi Embassy offered to pay more money if our crew had a concern," he said.

But he said all were reassured because "the FBI and Secret Service were heavily involved. They were in abundance every place we were."

The commission staff reported that each of the Saudi flights "was investigated by the FBI and dealt with in a professional manner prior to its departure." The staff said that 22 people on the bin Laden flight were interviewed by the FBI and that the FBI checked databases for information on the passengers. The commission said none of the passengers was on the terrorist watch list.

The flight manifest lists 13 people with the bin Laden surname and others with Brazilian, British, Indonesian and Yemeni passports. Passenger Omar Awad bin Laden had lived with Abdullah bin Laden, a nephew of Osama bin Laden who was involved in forming the U.S. branch of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth in Alexandria. Federal agents raided the office this spring in connection with a terrorism-related investigation. The FBI has described the group as a "suspected terrorist organization."

Among the other passengers was Shafiq bin Laden, a half brother of Osama bin Laden who was reportedly attending the annual investor conference of the Carlyle Group, a politically connected investment company in Washington, on Sept. 11, 2001. Also on board was Akberali Moawalla, an official with the investment company run by Yeslam bin Laden, another of Osama bin Laden's half brothers. Records show that a passenger, Kholoud Kurdi, lived in Northern Virginia with a bin Laden relative.

The bin Laden flight has received fresh publicity because it was a topic in Michael Moore's anti-Bush documentary, "Fahrenheit 9/11."

Researcher Margot Williams and staff writer Susan Schmidt contributed to this report.

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